



CORSHAM TOWN CENTRE

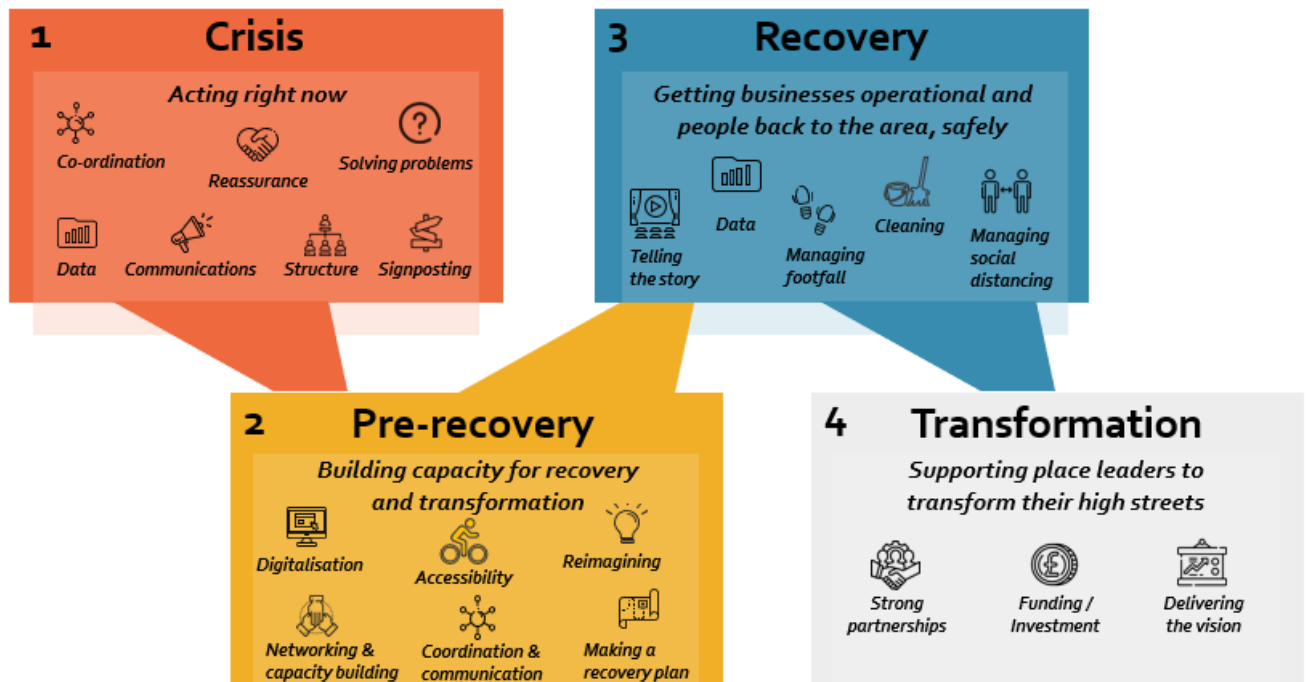
RECOVERY PLAN

JULY 2020

As with the rest of the country, Corsham’s town centre has experienced significant economic disruption due to the need to address public health concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to restrict public movement to contain the virus.

In April/May 2020, as restrictions started to ease, Corsham Town Council began looking at how a Recovery Plan for the town centre might look.

The recommendations for recovery plans are that they address four stages:



This Recovery Framework has been developed by the Institute of Place Management (IPM), lead partner of the High Streets Task Force (highstreetstaskforce.org.uk).

One of the key challenges of this Recovery Plan is to determine the best response to an evolving situation, not to develop something that cannot adapt to the direction of travel.

One approach may be to work through one scenario at a time, defining the optimal set of moves to be made if we knew for sure that the scenario would play out as planned, perhaps look at threats and opportunities, and then factor in the ‘what ifs’. This is for both Corsham currently, during the pandemic, and Corsham post-coronavirus too.

Trigger points should also be agreed so we know when the moment to act on any given scenario has arrived, based on informed decisions.

CRISIS

The crisis stage focuses on how town centres and place managers act immediately, supporting and helping stakeholders through the initial stages of the crisis.

Ramping up communication attempts via all channels, reassuring businesses and residents that protective measures and support mechanisms are in place, and slowly discussing the next steps of action, including ideas that can provide some short-term relief and normalcy especially for small businesses, are crucial. Data is also important. Footfall is an important baseline for recovery, as is accurate information on the types of business in a town, both of which can help guide the type of support required.



Co-ordination: Organising effort to make the response more efficient and/or the outcome more significant.

CTC Response: *Stepping up to take leadership and responsibility from an early stage in co-ordinating and supporting locally established volunteer groups and individuals in an effort to help vulnerable people and the wider community.*



Reassurance: Doing what you can to remove people's doubts/fears.

CTC Response: *Being visible in the community online, through telephone support and through staff, Councillors and volunteers on the ground. Ensuring those people feel safe and confident so they can convey a clear and, as far as possible, positive reassuring message.*



Solving Problems: Gathering and developing ways to respond to the immediate needs of local stakeholders.

CTC Response: *Implementing emergency delegated powers and ensuring senior management and elected members were working very closely with shared aims and objectives. Tackling issues and concerns as they arose and producing a clear action plan to enable speedy and effective decision-making.*



Data: Collecting, disseminating and using information to plan the response.

CTC Response: *At the crisis stage, emphasis was on research and ensuring all Government, NHS, Wiltshire Council and WHO rules and guidance was being gathered, filtered and disseminated. This was done by the Senior Management Team with support and scrutiny by the Chairman.*



Communications: Ensuring the right information reaches the right people at the right time.

CTC Response: *Sharing information from Government, NHS, Wiltshire Council and other agencies on social media to ensure it reaches as many local residents and businesses as possible. Working with Wiltshire Council officers on various response scenarios. Regular online meetings between the Senior Management Team and Councillors.*



Structure: Reviewing local governance structures and - if necessary - establish (temporary) body to coordinate action during the crisis and plan during pre-recovery stage.

CTC Response: *Emergency powers were implemented to give delegated decision-making powers to the Chief Executive. These were used in close liaison and discussion with the Chairman. Formal Council and Committee meetings were suspended. Once roles were established, weekly briefings were held to keep Councillors informed, allow scrutiny and offer ideas and suggestions. Staff meetings were increased from monthly to weekly.*



Sign-posting: Assisting stakeholders to access the help they need from a range of agencies.

CTC Response: *Signposting was focussed on: the general public, via social media; volunteer groups and individuals, via direct email and telephone (incoming and outgoing); and businesses, via email, letter, surveys and issuing guidance.*

PRE-RECOVERY

The pre-recovery stage is a crucial step towards building collective capacity and moving towards more reflexive forms of place governance and coordinated leadership.

During, and after, lockdown it is anticipated that our town and city centres will undergo a period of change, during which some businesses may not survive. Some towns will be more resilient than others and it is unlikely that businesses that do not have, at least, some online presence and way to communicate with customers can survive. However, with the right prioritisation of problems and solutions, town centres can develop place specific recovery plans to adapt to the impact. It is also an opportunity to reimagine town centres.



Digitalisation: Using digital technology, where appropriate, to facilitate placemaking and actions at all stages of COVID-19 recovery.

CTC Response: Use of technology to continue online meetings with staff, Councillors and key stakeholders. Increase use of social media platforms, including greater use of video. New website under development.



Accessibility: Consider different modes of transport to your centre. Plan for more walking and cycling.

CTC Response: Corsham's Cycling Strategy was out for public consultation during coronavirus crisis. The responses are being used to promote cycling through improved access, safety and security. The increase in walking during the emergency has been noticeable and this will be further encouraged through the support of walking groups. The Town Council is seeking to extend its free parking scheme to reduce miles travelled to nearby towns and support shopping locally.



Re-imagining: Using lockdown as time to assess and imagine new possibilities as well as develop capabilities and skills for recovery and transformation through learning and training.

CTC Response: Staff have been encouraged to take part in online training and webinars. This has been taken up in areas such as social media, climate change, Microsoft applications and finance. New ways of working have opened up the possibility for new projects/staff expansion and working from home if required.



Networking & Capacity Building: Finding and bringing together people and organisations to deliver the recovery plan.

CTC Response: Several new contacts have been made through the Business Survey and Artists Survey. This has helpfully gauged the impact on the local economy and opened new lines of communication.



Coordination & Communication: Acting as a central hub through which plans can be made and delivery tracked and communicated. Knowing your role in wider coordination and communication plans.

CTC Response: The Town Council has provided communications to and between groups, shared knowledge, and kept the community informed.



Making a Recovery Plan: Developing a deliverable recovery plan that will support businesses being operational and people returning.

CTC Response: *This recovery plan is an active, flexible guide to how Corsham town centre can recover from the Covid-19 emergency and emerge as a strong, resilient community. Main contributors are the Senior Management Team, in conjunction with Councillors.*

RECOVERY

The crisis stage has seen the enormous creativity and ingenuity of individuals and businesses – and this needs to be nurtured in the recovery stage, and not side-lined in an attempt to go back to how things were. There will, though, be a need to react quickly in order to revise plans that do not work.

The framework seeks to provide guidance on the measures to be undertaken once lockdown measures start to be lifted in order to get businesses and people back to places. Town centres need to learn from one another. Data collected regarding day-to-day indicators such as footfall, sentiment and spend will be crucial to establishing what the ‘new normal’ is like for town centres, and how best to manage social distancing in social spaces.



Telling the Story: Sharing stories about your place and its recovery. Encouraging confidence and stimulating pride in what is being achieved.

CTC Response: *Sharing stories on social media, CTC Newsletter, local Press (Business Survey) – potential for more community engagement/awards scheme.*



Data: Gathering information which can be used to monitor and evaluate the impact of your recovery strategy and identify where (and when) it may need to change. Understand how the function and attractiveness of your location may have changed and use this to plan for the future.

CTC Response: *Revisiting the Business Survey and Artists Survey results can help evaluate the impact of the recovery; car parking space count and tickets issued; footfall counts can all be gathered.*



Managing Footfall: Monitoring activity and using your recovery plan and networks to encourage people to return safely.

CTC Response: *Sympathetic advertising/Press coverage/free one or two hour parking can encourage people to return to the town safely.*



Cleaning: A cleaning regime to reduce risk of transmission of virus.

CTC Response: *CTC, its contractors and Wiltshire Council working in a co-ordinated and increased effort with additional monitoring of standards.*



Managing Social Distancing: Managing the space outside of stores, public space, and pavements etc to allow safe social distancing.

CTC Response: *Working with retailers, Martingate, Wiltshire Council, City Dressing (tbc) on use of public space.*

TRANSFORMATION

The transformation stage points at the conscious attempt to improve your place – to do more than recover but to innovate and address new challenges such as climate change, decarbonisation, economic inequality and social justice.

We may witness new and strong public-private partnerships attracting investment and funding, and the emergence of more grassroots projects can be expected as a result of the pandemic. At this stage, transforming town centres must deliver a range of goods and services for visitors, a good trading environment for businesses and a good quality of life for their residents. The pandemic also enables us to make town centres better places – safer to walk, with better air to breathe, with more community use and local businesses, and more opportunities for local employment, health and education.

In many ways the transformation stage will be about creating a ‘new normal’ which will reflect both the economic and social impact of coronavirus, mitigating measures and the aspirations of people for their high streets and towns to be better places.



Strong Partnerships: Creating, maintaining and refreshing place governance structures to meet the management and development needs of your place.

CTC Response: Building on the new networks to ensure a sustained effort to continuously improve Corsham town centre for the good of the community and the success of local businesses.



Funding/Investment: Building on your successes to secure internal and external support for your place.

CTC Response: Investing the Town Council’s resources in the public realm and events, and working with key partners, such as The Martingate Centre and Pound Arts, to attract further inward investment.



Delivering the Vision: Delivering the vision – using newly joined-up strategic partnerships of local stakeholders, to deliver long-term transformation and improvement.

CTC Response: Re-visiting the Town Council’s Strategic Plan 2018-2022 to ensure it is still fit for purpose in light of the impact of the Covid-19 emergency.